Background Information Pocahontas:

Pocahontas was born in 1595. She was the daughter of Powhatan, Chief of 30 Indian tribes in Virginia. Pocahontas was given the name of Matoaka, which means "Little Snow Feather." This was a name used only within the tribe because it was believed that if outsiders learned of the tribal name, harm would come to a person and to speak one's real name aloud was like opening a door to evil spirits. She was given the nickname of Pocahontas which has many different translations. It is loosely translated as "one who plays mostly," "playful one," "little wanton," and "playful, frolicsome little girl."

"In the year 1607, the first Englishmen came sailing across the ocean to settle in the part of the New World which they called Virginia after their virgin queen Elizabeth. They might have perished if it had not been for the help they got from the Indian Princess Pocahontas." (D'Aulaire, page 1, 1946.)

In December of 1607, Pocahontas was 12 years old. She saved the life of Captain John Smith who had been sentenced to death by her father. It is written that she held his head in her arms which, by laws of the tribe, meant that John Smith now belonged to Pocahontas. The two soon became good friends and after John Smith was released, Pocahontas visited the village of Jamestown often with baskets of food for her friends. Sometimes she took braves from the tribe so they could trade food and furs. Her father was not pleased with his daughter for her association with the white man.

In January of 1609, Pocahontas again saved John Smith's life and the lives of her friends in Jamestown when she warned them of her fathers plans to kill them.

A few years later, Pocahontas went to live in a neighboring village with a man named Japazaws and his wife. They sold her for a copper kettle and she was held as a political prisoner in Jamestown. She was treated very well while she was there and she even lived in the house of a minister. Pocahontas was taught Christianity. During this time she met and was instructed by a man named John Rolfe.

In April 1614, she was baptized an Anglican and given the name of Rebecca. In the same month, she was also married to John Rolfe. Many of her relatives and friends from the tribe attended the wedding, but her father did not come. He said that he would never set foot in a white man's settlement. The marriage of Pocahontas and John Rolfe began a period of peace among the Powhatan Indians and the people of Jamestown. This was an accomplishment that affected the rest of American history. This period of peace became known as the "Peace of Pocahontas"

A year later a son was born to Pocahontas and John Rolfe. They named him Thomas. Thomas was a year old when John decided to take his family to England. Several people from Pocahontas' tribe accompanied the Rolfe family. Pocahontas was received well and treated like royalty. She was invited to the palace of the Queen of England. They stayed there for a year and Pocahontas was happy. She did not want to leave.

Many of her people that were there with her became very ill because they were not used to the climate and the diseases in England. Pocahontas also became ill and it was decided that they would all return to Virginia. They set sail in 1617 but Pocahontas was not well. The ship anchored in the town of Gravesend. Pocahontas was taken to an inn and a doctor was sent for, but it was too late and Pocahontas died. She never saw the land of her father again. She was buried in a cemetery in Gravesend, England. Pocahontas was 21 at the time of her death. Her death marked the end of the Peace of Pocahontas. The fighting and outbreaks began again. Her husband is said to have been killed in a battle in 1622. Their son Thomas lived in England until he was 20 years old. At that time he returned to his mother's homeland, became a militia officer and commanded a frontier fort in Western Henrico on the James River.

"Although her life was short, Pocahontas is remembered for contributing to the maintenance of peace between the colonists and the natives. She remains an important part of American folk history to this day." (Sahlman, page 2, 1996.) Pocahontas forever influenced the history of Henrico County, the Commonwealth of Virginia and America.